



# FURTHERING MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## *The Palestinian-Israeli Agreement on Gaza Border Crossings and Access*

*"I am pleased to be able to announce today that Israel and the Palestinian Authority have concluded an agreement on movement and access."*  
*—Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, November 14, 2005*

The United States remains firmly committed to tangible progress toward President Bush's two-state vision of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. The Palestinian-Israeli agreement to open an international border crossing in Gaza is a significant step that will give the Palestinian people greater freedom and dignity, plus expanded economic and trade opportunities, while addressing Israel's legitimate security needs.

Palestinians will gain control over entry and exit from Gaza for the first time since 1967 when the international crossing opens at Rafah, a Gaza city on the Egyptian border, on the target date of November 25, 2005.

### **BUILDING ON GAZA WITHDRAWAL**

The agreement maintains the positive momentum following Israel's courageous decision to withdraw from Gaza, builds further trust between the parties, and creates an environment more conducive to progress in accordance with the Roadmap.

### **NEGOTIATING ASSISTANCE**

The agreement was negotiated with key assistance from Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and reflects the strong commitment of the United States to work with the parties to maintain the momentum of Gaza disengagement. It also reflects the hard work of James Wolfensohn, Special Envoy of the Quartet (Russia, the United States, the United Nations and the European Union), the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority, and the European Union which will play a key role in implementing the agreement. The Egyptian Government also provided crucial support in helping move the agreement forward.

The Agreement covers a number of areas:

- In addition to opening the Rafah crossing, the Palestinians and Israel will upgrade and expand other crossings for people and cargo between Israel, Gaza and the West Bank.

This is especially important to facilitate the export of this season's agricultural produce from Gaza.

- The Palestinians will be able to move between Gaza and the West Bank – specifically, bus and truck convoys are to begin within 2 months.
- By the end of the year, the United States and Israel will complete work to identify obstacles to movement within the West Bank and develop a plan to reduce them.
- The construction of a Palestinian seaport can begin. The parties also agreed on the importance of the airport, and Israel recognizes that the Palestinian Authority will want to resume construction on the Gaza airport.

### **U.S. FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO PALESTINIANS**

The United States is making substantial contributions in support of these efforts.

- USAID has spent more than \$1.7 billion in the West Bank and Gaza since 1993 to combat poverty, create jobs, improve education, build roads and water systems, construct and equip medical clinics, and promote good governance.
- Since 1993, the Department of State has contributed almost a billion dollars to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA) to help fund education, health, and employment programs serving 4.2 million Palestinian refugees.
- Since Palestinian President Abbas' election, USAID assistance and requested funding in support of Palestinians has totaled over \$440 million.

### **SECURITY**

As the United States works to create conditions that will allow the Palestinian economy to grow, the focus must also remain on the critical issue of fighting terror. The U.S. will continue to work with the parties to ensure that anyone involved in criminal activities or violence will be prevented from passing through Rafah or any other crossing.